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Contact: Judith Ingram,
Communications Director,
(202) 523-3240, ext. 127
ommunications@uscirf.gov

Tuesday, April 15, 2008, 1-3:30 pm Cannon House Building, Room 340 1 pm:
Release of USCIRF Report:

A Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea

and

2 pm: USCIRF and Congressional Korea Caucus Joint Briefing:

Human Rights in North Korea

WASHINGTON- As South Korean President Lee Myung-bak prepares for his first meeting with the U.S. President, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is releasing a new report on religious freedom violations in North Korea, which highlights China's forced repatriation of North Korean refugees and their brutal mistreatment when they return home. Together with the Congressional Korea Caucus, the Commission will sponsor an expert briefing on the suppression of religious freedom and other human rights in North Korea.

Release of USCIRF Report:

A Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea offers fresh insight into the grave situation for North Korean refugees who have been forcibly repatriated from China back to North Korea. Refugees face severe persecution, including harsh interrogations, long-term imprisonment, and torture if they are found to have converted to Christianity or have had ongoing contact with South Korean churches. The North Korean dictatorship perceives religion as a security threat to be combated at all costs.

A Prison Without Bars follows up the Commission's 2005 study on North Korea's brutal suppression of religious freedom, Thank You Father Kim Il Sung, once again providing a channel for North Korean nationals to present their experiences to the international community. Refugees interviewed for the report attest to the continuing existence of elements of Buddhism, Christianity and traditional folk beliefs such as Shamanism in North Korea in spite of the repression. Former North Korean security agents, who were also interviewed for this report, testify to increased police activity aimed at halting religious activities in the border regions with China-including the infiltration of churches in China and setting up of mock prayer meetings to entrap new converts in North Korea.

The Commission will present the new report at 1 p.m.

USCIRF and Congressional Korea Caucus Joint Briefing:

There is a pressing need on the international level for more effective action that addresses the ongoing repression of human rights in North Korea and the problems faced by North Korean refugees in China. A necessary focus on nuclear security should not preclude or diminish diplomatic efforts to address ongoing and egregious humanitarian, refugee, and human rights concerns.

Speakers at this briefing will discuss the humanitarian issues facing North Korean residents and refugees in China, and will explore ways for the United States to actively protect North Koreans in advance of the United States - Republic of Korea summit.

Confirmed speakers include:

Michael Cromartie

Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Nina Shea, Commissioner

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Imam Talal Eid, Commissioner

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

David Hawk

Reagan-Fascell Fellow, National Endowment for Democracy

Peter Beck

Executive Director, U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea

Jae Ku

Executive Director, U.S.-Korea Institute at the School for Advanced International Studies,
Johns Hopkins University

The joint briefing will start at 2 p.m.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Michael Cron

Richard D. La

Felice D. Gae

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